

## Sermon Notes for Trinity XVI

*“that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith”* (Epistle)

When clergy meet, they talk. And when I last met some fellow-priests in TTAC, we talked of spiritual tiredness. It may come in other circumstances; it certainly comes with age. It is not a sin, but it is rightly numbered among the roots of sin, vulgarly called the “seven deadly sins”. It is close cousin to sloth, but not the same. It is the priest's duty to be aware of his condition, and to combat it as well as he can. There is no easy remedy, except the dutiful performance of one's obligations. Spiritual joy cannot be forced, no more than secular joy. But if we keep on the right path, God has his good gifts when they are suited to us.

The great blessing of the Prayer Book, and other similar systems in the Church, is that they give a clear pattern of obligations. We do not know when the Jews adopted a fixed pattern of synagogue readings. Probably some time after the separation of the Church; in which case the idea was rightly borrowed. So, it may be, it is hard to pray, and our own words will not “come”. But, for the clergy, Morning and Evening prayer are just given; a mechanical daily recital may not seem to convey any good (though how can we know – constantly checking is an excellent way of losing any good there was) but it leaves us open to better, and it does acknowledge God and our duty to worship.

I have mentioned myself and my colleagues in this way for several reasons. We priests do need the prayers and support of the people, perhaps more as we age and everything gets harder. These problems are not confined to the clergy; if the remedies are not identical, similar approaches may help. And both priest and people should understand the benefits of the fixed liturgical system. We are not dependent on my “inspiration”, on my choice of readings, from service to service.

Worship there must be (and solitary worship if collective worship is not possible), and it will be more or less inadequate to God and inspiring to man. Students of liturgy think that we would find the worship of the early church (in the period say from 100 to 350 A.D.) very dull, and the attempt to make worship interesting, whether by ancient or modern devices, has been neither successful nor, in general, of spiritual benefit. Was New Testament worship more exciting before the regularisations made by the early church? Not intentionally, I think. Paul was more concerned to discipline worship than to encourage “exciting” phenomena such as the gift of tongues.

Should we then seek for more in private prayer? No, we cannot sensibly demand that God make our private prayer “rewarding” in any earthly sense. To work ourselves up into a “spiritual” state is a fraud. If we seek pleasures from our discipleship, are we not “following Christ for loaves”?

Yet the Epistle is not false or unhelpful teaching. Heaven is a place of joy; we need to have these hints at it set before us; but our earthly preparation for it is not bound to be pleasant. This is a familiar caution, and added to it is the warning that Satan counterfeits spiritual joys. So some spiritual writers advise extreme caution. I suspect that such advice is for those more advanced in grace than we are. God is generous to help all those who struggle on the narrow way.

Paul's point is that we must understand the gifts we have received. Here is how John Chrysostom expounded the passage. “How doth Christ dwell in the hearts? Hear what Christ Himself saith, *I and my Father will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* (John xiv: 23.) He dwelleth in those hearts that are faithful, in those that are *rooted* in His love, those that remain firm and unshaken. Although the love of Christ lies above the reach of all human knowledge, yet shall ye know it, if ye shall have Christ dwelling in you, yea, not only shall know from Him this, but shall even be *filled unto all the fulness of God*; meaning by the *fulness of God*, either the knowledge how God is worshipped in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, or else urging them thus to use every effort, in order to be filled with all virtue, of which God is full.”

*“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. That God hath done abundantly above all that we ask or think is evident from what the Apostle himself hath written. For I indeed, saith he, pray, but He of Himself, even without any prayer of mine, will do works greater than all we ask, not simply greater, nor abundantly greater, but exceeding abundantly. And this is evident from the power, that worketh in us: for neither did we ever ask these things, nor did we expect them.”*